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THE DARK TOWER -THE GUNSLINGER-



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2 of 2
PARENTAL ADVISORY

EVIL GROUND

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"He knows it's a dream . . . and yet he can't escape it. Always look for the back door, Cort used to tell them, but if there's a back door in this dream, Roland cannot find it."

WOLVES OF THE CALLA, 169

There are many places where Aileen would rather be than sitting at the campfire with Sheemie and Randolph, finding things to say or do to keep the addled young man entertained.

But Roland told her that this is where she had to be, and she obeyed him.

So she and Sheemie make idle chitchat, and both of them try to ignore the simple fact that's playing on both their minds...

...mainly that Roland and the others are overdue, and there's never any good reason for that.

And that's when the bad reason presents itself.

Roland!
You're...you're hurt!

I appreciate your concern, but actually I'm pretty much the only one who isn't.



What follows then is a flurry of tending to the wounded, of which there are way too many.

Steady, Jamie. Roland will have those bullets out of your leg in no time.

I cannot begin to tell you--*uuuunnnh*--how much faith your confidence gives me.

Arrrrrrh!
Dammit, Alain! Can't you even put a bandage on?!

What a grouch.

What did you say?

Nothing, nothing.



Sheemie! Thomas! *Hurry up!* Finish getting Randolph ready to travel.

Shouldn't we remain here? To give them time to recover from their wounds?

Would that we could. But staying here isn't really an option.



And so, at Roland's urging, the friends set off within the half hour. Available hands are few and even the most wounded have to carry packs.

Their subsequent march down the river is done in silence, hastening them toward the mountains even as they keep their ears open for any sign of pursuit.

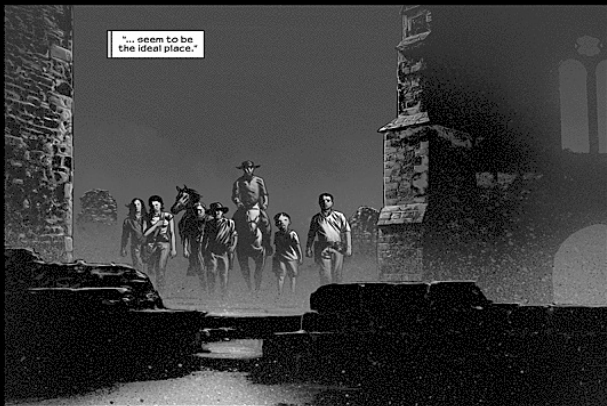


Look at those ruins. What do you think they used to be?

Can't say I really *care* at the moment. How are the bandages holding up?

Fine. I'm just fine.







Let's get
a fire going
so I can cook
us up some
food.

Don't be ridiculous. I've *tasted*
your cooking. Barely edible.
Leave the task to Aileen.
She's a girl. It more suits
her abilities.



OWW!

WAK

Sheemie's
going to cook. He's
the best one here at
that particular skill.
And by the way,
you're an idiot.



Aileen is as good as her word
and Sheemie's skills at the fire
they build are beyond reproach.
This does not mean, however,
that Sheemie has no
concerns of his own.



This place...
it stinks of
poison.

We're in the
ruins of what was
clearly once a *castle*.
Whatever led to its
demise may still lurk
in the stones
surrounding us.



But don't concern yourself. Whatever might still reside in the stones, I'm sure we'll have more than enough ammo to handle it.

Best though for us to get as much sleep as we can. So don't let whatever you're smelling keep you awake.



With that advice ringing in the night air, Roland and the others settle to sleep.



Unfortunately, Sheemie finds himself unable to ignore whatever's bothering him. The evening rings with the snoring of the gunslingers, but Sheemie doesn't join them.

And as a consequence, he witnesses the following...



This is
odd. I don't
remember...

How
did we get
here?

Ignore him.
He's just here to
ruin everyone's
good time.

Would
you care to
dance?

Of
course!

Bert...
Alain...what's
happening
here?

Everyone's
having a great
time except
you. What else
is new?









You see so little, Roland. You see so *little* and understand even *less*. Clearly I failed to instill in you the proper way to see the world.

You must see with the eyes of the dead.

As it happens, I'm in a far better position to grant you that *now* than when I was alive.

Your friends and you are in *deadly danger*, Roland. Unfortunately, you can't even see it. *Shemie*, fortunately enough, can. It was his cries that brought me here.



His cries that
prompted me to
return from the dead
so that I can prevent
you and your friends
from joining me before
your time.

See for
yourself the ghouls
who existed in the
stone where you sleep.
The ghouls who've
trapped you all in
the collective
dream...

...while they
feed on your
helpless bodies
in the real
world.

And now, boy,
do the one thing
you can do to save
yourselves.

Blow your
horn. Blow
the sound of
alarm in your
dream....



...that will
carry you over
into the real
world.



And once
you're there,
triumph over
anything that
attacks you.



The moment Roland manages to
kick himself clear of the ghoul, he
yanks out the real world horn
and unleashes a ululating blast....







...the ghoul seems
unimpressed.



I don't know
what you are, or
where you came
from...but *this*
I swear...



I'm going
to send you
back there!



Again, and again, and again,
he brings the horn slamming
down onto the creature's
head.



The beast endures a beating
that would kill ten mortal men
and still it fights back. But it's
moving slower and slower.



A third time Roland puts
the horn to his lips. A third
time he blows it loud.



And this time it's
horses that
respond.



*But not the horses
belonging to Roland
and the others.*

*No, these horses are spiritual,
coming from another land entirely.
A land where heroes live. Heroes
who have existed in the greatest
legends that Roland has ever
learned.*

*Roland looks on in astonishment as
Arthur Eld, the first of his line,
and his noble knights, come
stamping through the ruins.*



The ghouls run from the oncoming stampede, breaking before the flow of classic heroism that bears down upon them. Within seconds they've scattered back to wherever it is they came from.

Arthur briefly reins up and pulls out his own horn--perhaps the very one that Roland himself had been blowing. A single blast is emitted from the horn...

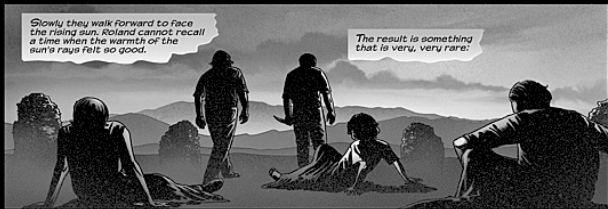


...and all of Roland's friends come fully around to wakefulness.



Slowly they walk forward to face the rising sun. Roland cannot recall a time when the warmth of the sun's rays felt so good.

The result is something that is very, very rare:



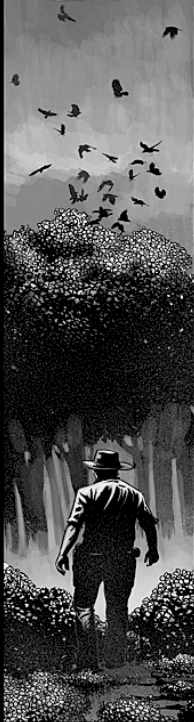
Roland smiles.



And with that, the older Roland--the star of our story--fully awakens.



It takes him long moments to realize where he is and what has happened to him. In the near distance, his vision takes in a murder of crows flapping about.



Intrigued to know what it is that has captured the attention of the crows, he follows them a short distance and discovers that which had remained hidden from him before. The body of the hobo lies there, staring toward a sun it will never see.



For long moments, Roland just stares at him. He wonders what the hobo's personal story is. What brought him there, what went wrong. How he died.



What his last thoughts were.



Realizing that he will never know, Roland chooses to leave his hat on the hobo's head. A silent acknowledgment that, in another lifetime, this was as much a man as he was.

And with the image of Arthur Eld and his long gone friends in his memory, Roland walks off into the rapidly rising sun, to continue his pursuit of the Man in Black that will likely never end.



EVIL GROUND PART II: THE HORN OF ELD

WARNING:
This article contains spoilers!

For many Dark Tower fans, the most important objects in Mid-World are Roland Deschain's sandalwood-handled six-shooters. Passed down from father to son for hundreds of years, these powerful weapons not only identify Roland as the last of Mid-World's elite gunslingers, but they also prove him to be the final descendant of Arthur Eld, the ancient king of All-World. In the dangerous, lawless lands of Mid-World, the guns of Deschain are key to Roland's survival. Without these guns and without the training that makes a man worthy of bearing them, Roland would have passed into the clearing long ago. Yet while the guns of Deschain have both a practical and a magical purpose (as longtime fans of

the novels will remember, Roland needs these guns, and the *sigil* engraved upon them, if he ever hopes to enter the Dark Tower), there is another, more mystical object that is just as central to Roland's destiny, though it is mentioned much less frequently. That object is the horn of Eld.

Just as guns are symbols of strength and dominance, so horns are traditional symbols of power and dominion. Associated with warriors, hunters, heroes and angels, horns are used to warn of danger, to summon in times of need and to drive away evil influences. In the Alps, herdsman sound their long wooden horns to prolong daylight and to protect both animals and humans during the dangerous transition time between day and night. In both Christianity and Islam, Judgment Day will be announced by the sounding of God's Horn.

Although we think of horns as being cast from metal, the first of these instruments were made from animal horn, and so retained the magical properties of the animals from which they came. In Africa, horns made from elephant tusks are highly prized. Associated with the moon because of



their crescent shape, these horns are used during eclipses to drive away the monster eating the moon.

In both myth and legend, horns—like swords—are frequently given names, endowing them with personalities, specific magical powers or particular destinies. The magical ivory horn owned by Charlemagne's Roland was called Olivant, and it had once belonged to a giant. When it was sounded at the battle of Roncesvaux, birds fell from the sky and the enemy Saracens fell into a panic. According to Norse mythology, the sounding of Heimdall's horn, Gjallarhorn, will mark the beginning of Ragnarök.

Like the guns of Deschain, the horn of Eld originally belonged to Roland's illustrious ancestor, Arthur Eld. And like those guns, the horn of Eld is intrinsically linked to Roland's quest for the Dark Tower. In fact, the relationship between the horn of Eld and Roland's quest is stated directly in the final sentence of *The Gunslinger*, Book I of the Dark Tower novels. "The gunslinger waited for the time of the drawing and dreamed his long dreams of the Dark Tower, to which he would some day come at dusk and approach, winding his horn, to do

some unimaginable final battle." We do not yet know what that battle might be, but given the horrors of End-World and the magical properties of horns, we can surmise that Roland's enemy will be far from human.

In the revised edition of *The Gunslinger*, and in *The Wolves of the Calla*, we learn the reason why the guns of Deschain play a much larger part in Roland's ongoing narrative than his horn, and that reason is a simple one. While Roland still has possession of the guns of his fathers, he lost his horn at the Battle of Jericho Hill. During the gunslingers' final charge against Farson's blue-faced barbarians, Cuthbert, not Roland, sounded the horn of Eld. "For I blow it sweeter than you ever did," Cuthbert tells Roland just before their final charge against their foes. "You can have it again when I'm dead. Neglect not to pick it up . . . for it is your property." Yet amid the bloodlust of battle and the raging grief of loss, Roland leaves the horn of his fathers on the battlefield, next to the corpse of his beloved friend.

Given the importance of the horn of Eld (after all, in *The Dark Tower* we discover that it is both Roland's *sigil* and the key to his salvation), I





thought it was very important for us to use it in our comics. In *The Fall of Gilead* Steven Deschain sounds the horn of Eld when he and his fellow gunslingers are led into a trap by the traitorous spy, Justus. When Roland hears the distant echo of his father's horn, he knows that the end has come for Gilead, and for the gunslingers. Once Steven is dead—killed by yet another traitor—Roland inherits both guns and horn. These remain with him until close to the end of *The Battle of Jericho Hill*, when once again Roland's *ka*, and that of the horn, intertwine.

On the night before the gunslinger's final battle, Roland and Cuthbert are out scouting. To their horror, they discover an enemy camp less than a mile from their own. Our gunslingers slaughter Farson's men, and when a mysterious rider comes galloping toward them, they shoot him as well, only to discover that they

have mortally wounded their *ka-mate*, Alain, who has ridden hard from Rimrocks to tell them what they have already discovered. Namely, that one of their trusted friends has turned traitor and has betrayed them to the enemy.

At this point in the narrative, Roland makes a grave mistake. Rather than sounding the horn of Eld himself, he hands it to Cuthbert. Bert sounds this ancient instrument three times. First, as he and Roland gallop back to camp, carrying Alain's body. Second, to warn his fellow gunslingers that Farson's men have arrived and that the Battle of Jericho Hill is about to begin. Finally, he sounds the horn before he and Roland—the last of their company—make a final charge against the enemy. When Bert falls—an arrow through his eye—Roland does not stop to pick up the horn of his fathers. Instead he fights wildly, killing as many soldiers of the Outer



Dark as he can before swooning and falling into a deathlike stupor.

Given the mythic resonance of horns and their association with summoning help and driving away evil, I thought it was very important to weave the horn of Eld into the comic book you now hold in your hands. *Evil Ground* is not just a ghost story; it is a ghost-story-within-a-ghost-story. And it is not just about Roland's past; it is about his future too. Although Roland doesn't know it, he is heading through the Desatoya Mountains toward the town of Eluria, where the demonic, blood-drinking Little Sisters await him. The dream-demons he faces while sleeping on a bed of devil grass are not just born of memories of what has occurred before; they are pre-echoes of what is to come. But the blood-drinking demons Roland once faced with his friends—and his tet's deliverance from those hellish horrors—also act as a

reminder of Roland's special lineage. Roland Deschain, the last knight of the White, always remembers the faces of his fathers. But in turn, his fathers remember him. In times of great need, Roland's forebears—and the energies of the White, which they represent—will always come to his aid. Like the guns of Deschain, the horn of Eld is a link to Roland's past, and to his very special destiny. Its magic is the magic of the Dark Tower itself, and that magic surrounds Roland like an invisible but invincible aura. Although Roland does not have the horn of Eld with him any longer, we can't help but believe that at least some of its power will always remain, like the resonant echo of a blast, trumpeted over the red field of roses surrounding the Dark Tower.

Until next month, long days and pleasant nights.

Robin Furth

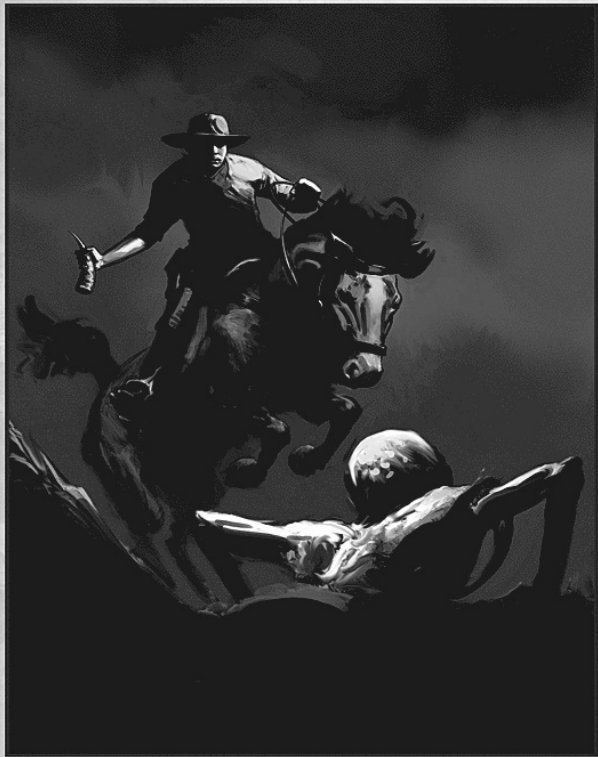
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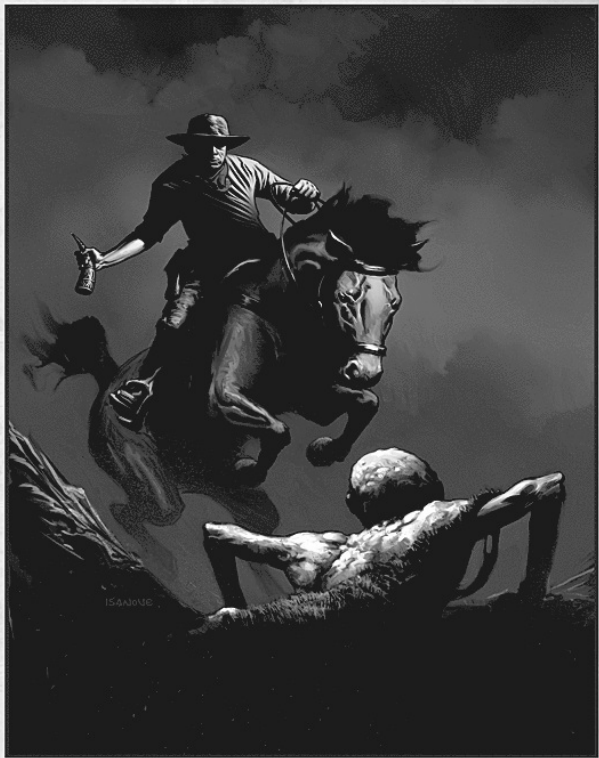
COVER COLOR SKETCH



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ART EVOLUTION FROM SKETCH TO COLOR

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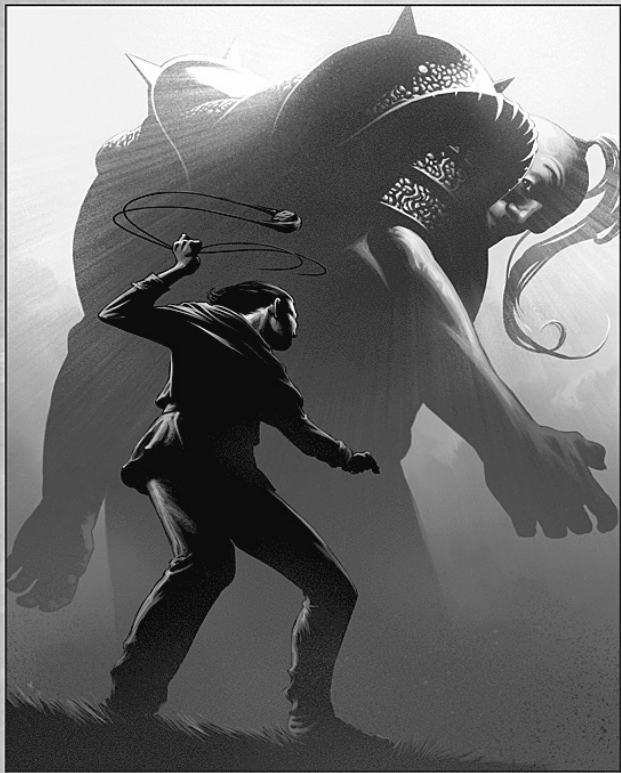
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NEXT: SO FELL LORD PERTH...





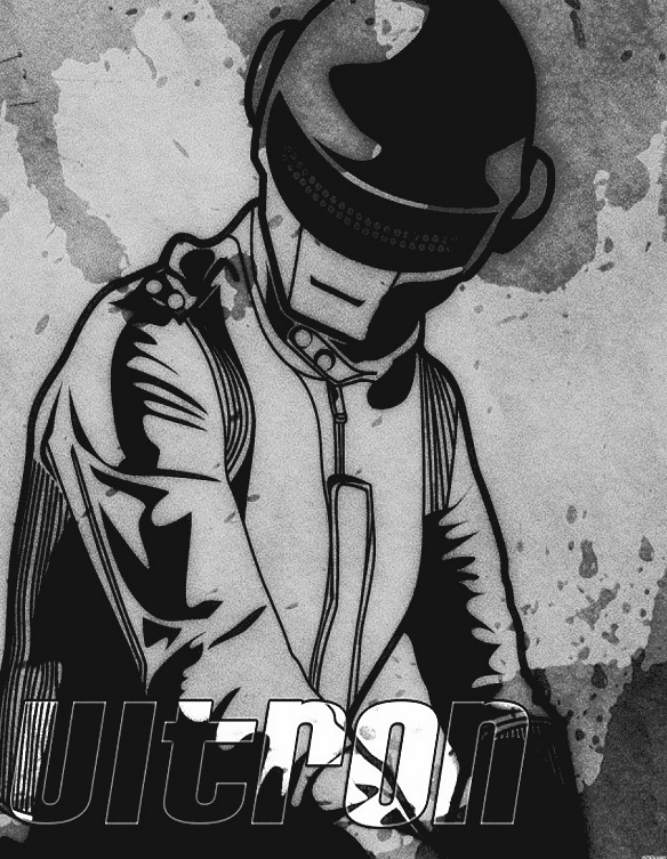
In this all-new tale of the haunted Gunslinger, Roland remembers back to his wild youth, a time when he was not alone...when Roland and his friends, Alain, Cuthbert, Jamie DeCurry and Thomas Whitman fought together in their first tet. A battle that will leave him alive and alone, with only hardened memories of a tainted land that hungers for blood. Roland is dreaming of Evil Ground...

From the renowned creative team of writers Robin Furth & Peter David and artist Richard Isanove comes a violent chapter of the Dark Tower saga. With fantasy, horror, revenge, drama and a dash of the Old West, such a story could only come from storytelling legend Stephen King.

PARENTAL ADVISORY
FOR STRONG LANGUAGE & SEXUAL CONTENT



SON OF



ULTRAMAN